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Samyukt Kisan Morcha leader Darshan Pal (L) and others at a press conference near Singhu border in New Delhi on Saturday | PTI

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TRACTOR MARCH POSTPONED, BUT PROTESTS TO CONTINUE

Farmers postpone Monday's Parliament march, but agitation will continue till demands, including the one on MSP, are met

UNIONS LIST PENDING DEMANDS FOR CENTRE

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha, which is heading the stir against the three farm bills, has said it welcomes Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to repeal the bills and is urging fulfillment of six other demands, including a statutory guarantee of Minimum Support Price, withdrawal of the draft Electricity Amendment Bill and suspension of Union Minister Ajay Mishra

STUBBLE BURNING TO BE DECRIMINALISED

- Earlier on Saturday, the Union Agriculture Minister said stubble burning has been decriminalised as per the farmers' demand
- SKM, an umbrella body of farm unions, also said Modi should direct states and Railways to withdraw cases against protesting farmers. Parliament's winter session begins on Monday | P9

Dec 4
NEXT MEETING OF SKM TO DECIDE FARMERS' COURSE OF ACTION

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Int'l travel curbs may stay as new variant spreads

PM seeks review of plans to resume regular flights, urges states to ramp up vaccination

KUMAR VIKRAM @ New Delhi

CONCERNED over the new Covid-19 variant B.1.1.529 found in South Africa that has been designated as a 'variant of concern' by the World Health Organization and named Omicron, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday asked officials to review plans for easing of international travel restrictions in India.

At a comprehensive meeting to review the public health preparedness in the backdrop of Omicron, which is possibly more transmissible than the highly infectious Delta variant, the PM highlighted the need for monitoring all international arrivals, their testing as per guidelines with a specific focus on countries identified as 'at risk.'

Britain tightens Covid rules

Britain has tightened rules on foreign travellers after detecting two Omicron cases, now requiring a RCT-PCR test for arrivals. In shops & public transport, masks are now mandatory

The meeting was held a day after the civil aviation ministry said regular international passenger flights would resume operation from December 15 with certain exceptions. Countries marked as 'at risk' by the Union health ministry would continue to have restrictions on the number of weekly flights with India.

Saturday's meeting came in the backdrop of suspected Omicron cases being reported in the Netherlands and Czech Republic, and confirmed cases in Belgium, Israel, Germany, Italy and the UK, besides Hong Kong, South Africa and Botswana.

The UK, the US, the EU, Australia, Brazil, Turkey, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Oman and Thailand, among others have already banned travel from certain African countries to check potential spread.

In Saturday's meeting, the PM stressed the need to increase the second dose coverage and also asked states to ensure that all those who have got the first dose are given the second dose on time. He also directed officials to work closely with state governments so that there is proper awareness at the state and district level.

MORE REPORTS ON: P9, 12, 16

JAB-O-METER
TAKE YOUR SHOT
Nov 26 65,23,396 doses
Nov 27 73,74,792 doses
TOTAL: 139,08,12,957

NATIONWIDE	NOV 26	NOV 27
Fresh cases	10,549	8,318
Recoveries	9,868	10,967
Deaths	488	465

KARNATAKA	NOV 26	NOV 27
Fresh cases	402	322
Recoveries	277	176
Deaths	6	3

EXPRESS READ

Maharashtra tightens inter-state travel rules

Mumbai: As fears over the new Omicron variant mount, the Maharashtra government on Saturday said domestic travellers to the state must either be fully vaccinated or have a negative RT-PCR report. Arrivals from foreign countries will need to follow the Union government's directions for entry | P9

Drugmakers race to test vaccines against variant

The pharma majors who made vaccines for the novel coronavirus are racing to get their hands on the Omicron strain. Johnson & Johnson is already testing its shot against the strain, while AstraZeneca — which helped design Covishield — is conducting vaccine research in the African nations Botswana and Eswatini

Caring for Karwar

P2

BSF, BGB
TO ENHANCE COOPERATION

The border guarding forces of India and Bangladesh have decided to up cooperation to check transboundary crimes.

WITH THIS ISSUE
METAVERSE IS COMING
PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

Healthcare workers collect swab samples of a child at the Kempegowda Bus Station in Bengaluru on Saturday | SHRIRAM BN

- 24x7 vigilance at airports to check passengers arriving from abroad. Round-the-clock screening in districts that share the borders with neighbouring states
- RTPCR-negative certificate must for those entering from Maharashtra and Kerala
- Schools and colleges cannot organise cultural programmes and seminars
- Masks mandatory at all political rallies /campaigns, weddings and other events
- Covid test a must once every seven days for those staying in hostels
- The Union government expected to permit the booster dose for frontline workers next week

Another meeting with all the stakeholders will be convened to issue detailed guidelines for Christmas and New Year celebrations

Amid Omicron worry, state makes 2 jabs must for staff

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka government has made it mandatory for those working in public places, including all government offices, malls, cinemas, libraries and other places, to get two doses of Covid vaccine. Workers who are not fully vaccinated should be sent back till their two doses are completed, the government said.

Vigil is being stepped up at airports, especially to check those arriving from abroad and from districts that share borders with Kerala and Maharashtra. The two neighbouring states have continued to witness a high number of Covid cases and travellers from there should also carry a negative RTPCR certificate.

Health officials have been told to work 24x7 in border areas to screen those entering Karnataka.

Police, revenue, and health department officials should work in three shifts and senior officials must conduct surprise checks even at nights, the government stated.

Students from Kerala, who returned to the state over the last 16 days, have to take an RT-PCR test again even though they had arrived with a negative report earlier.

On Saturday, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai convened an emergency meeting with health officials, ministers, Covid advisors and other stakeholders as the state reported four virus clusters in Dharwad, Bengaluru and Mysuru over the last few days.

Bommai also held a video conference with deputy commissioners from districts that share the border with other states, especially Kerala.

MORE REPORTS: P3

Epidemiologist calls for improving vax coverage

With the new coronavirus variant raising fresh concerns, TAC member Dr Giridhara R Babu, in an explainer to TNIE, suggests some of the immediate actions the government can take. P3

102 more cases detected at Dharwad college

The SDM Medical College near Dharwad reported 102 new Covid cases on Saturday. With this increase, the institution has detected a total of 306 Covid-positive cases so far.

Two from SA test +ve, DC says it's Delta

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

AMID concerns over two travellers from South Africa, who arrived at the Kempegowda International Airport, testing positive for Covid, the Deputy Commissioner of Bengaluru Rural claimed late on Saturday evening that they are infected with the Delta variant, and not the new Omicron variant.

After reports of the two travellers testing positive emerged, the entire state and Bengaluru were on tenterhooks throughout Saturday as the genomic sequencing of the virus was awaited. There was a collective sigh of relief when the DC said that the test results had arrived earlier and they were found to be Delta variant.

However, Dr V Ravi, head of the Genome Sequencing Committee, said he is not aware of genome sequencing of samples of the two travellers and it was not done at NIMHANS. P3

TMC likely to skip Cong-led meet as it eyes chief Oppn role

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kolkata

IN another bid to project itself as the main anti-BJP party, the Trinamool Congress is likely to skip the meeting of opposition parties convened by the Congress on Monday for a joint strategy during the winter Parliament session, party sources said on Saturday.

"The Trinamool is not interested in coordinating with the Congress but the party has no problem in coordinating with other opposition parties," a party leader said. "In such a situation, the Trinamool will lead the alliance. The recent defection from the Congress to our party shows we are the main opposition against the Bharatiya Janta Party."

The final decision on boycotting the meeting would be taken by party supremo Mamata Banerjee, and it could arrive at a time when the rift between the Trinamool Congress and the grand old party is growing. The Trinamool Congress recently poached Congress legislators in Tripura, Meghalaya and Goa and is portraying itself as the main party confronting the BJP. "The thumping victory in the recent Assembly elections proved that the Trinamool is the main political party that decimated the BJP in Bengal despite the saffron camp's aggressive campaign," a senior Trinamool leader said.

"We are now busy spreading our footprint in national politics and building an image as the only anti-BJP political party. But the Congress is trying to portray itself as the main face of anti-BJP forces by convening the meeting, which we do not agree with," the leader added.

During her recent visit to Delhi, Banerjee did not meet interim Congress president Sonia Gandhi, but instead met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stoking speculation.

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MIND GAMES

Soldiers may be taught to beat China in talks

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

THE Army is working on honing negotiation skills of the soldiers mandated to communicate and hold bilateral talks with the Chinese troops as interactions between the soldiers of the two countries increase.

According to a source, "The training on negotiation techniques is in its conceptual stage, keeping in mind the way talks have been taking place at different command levels."

The need for more training arose after the Chinese side either stretched the meeting for long hours "to wear out the other side during the talks" or behaved erratically, raising voices to play mind games with Indians.

The whole gamut of responses along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been under review since the military standoff of May 2020.

The Army has also formalised a course on Tibetan language and culture to "amalgamate its troops well with the people of Tibet."

The course run by the Army in association with the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies and Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Sikkim, aims to make soldiers understand cultural nuances and teach them with the language so that they can mix with the Tibetan population living on the Indian side of the LAC.

This will wean the people away from the Chinese propaganda, the source said. There are people from the same tribes living on both sides of the LAC.

The frequency of meetings, talks and hotline communication has increased between the two sides. As per the old agreements, nine Border Personnel Meetings are held between the two countries every year on ceremonial occasions.